

Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

That Pitt Street ghost again

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Image: St. Paul's Episcopal Church and the "Haunted" sidewalk. Photo, Denise Dunbar.

Readers may know the story of the Female Stranger, but the Pitt Street "ghost" may be less familiar to them. The July 20, 1885 Alexandria Gazette related:

A year or two ago several individuals, at different times, were scared out of seven year's growth by catching glimpses, after nightfall, of a somber-clad tall figure, supposed to be of the feminine persuasion, whose wont it was to glide noiselessly along the pavement in front of St. Paul's church, or to suddenly emerge from either of the alleys on that thoroughfare and stand in front of some belated pedestrian until each separate hair on the latter's cranium assumed a perpendicular position.

Sightings of the apparition had died down in the early part of 1885, until the Gazette reported:

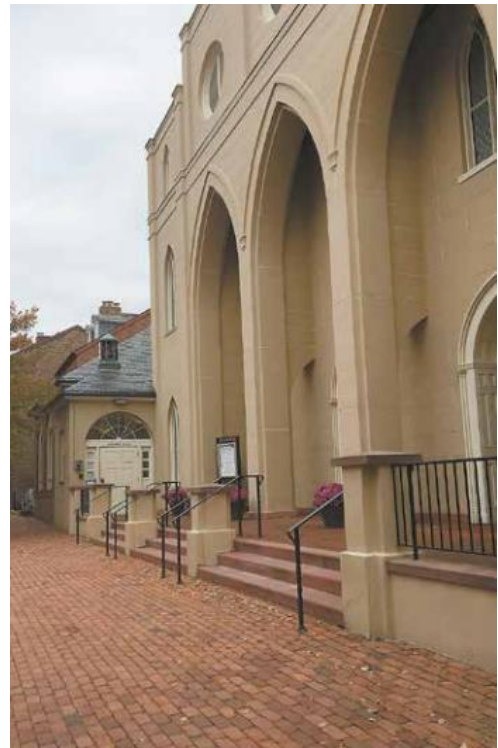
Last Saturday night, the 'ghost' made its appearance to Mr. James Wood, who was on his way Home...It was twelve midnight, that lonely hour when graveyards yawn, when this gentleman, with a box of oysters under each arm, started from the Opera House Restaurant for his home.

Like others, Wood spotted the "irrepressible figure" as he passed by St. Paul's. Wood claimed to not believe in the supernatural, and hurried his gait to catch the apparition, but found his efforts frustrated when he got within five feet of the specter.

Instead of using a cell phone as we would today, Wood "smoked up vigorously on a cigar he had in his mouth, for the purpose of shedding as much light as possible," according to the Gazette. His tobacco provided no more insight into the identity of the "ghost" as "in the twinkling of an eye, the spook vanished as suddenly as a ring of smoke or a burst soap bubble."

Despite his bravado in approaching the figure, Wood's courage gave way, and he beat a hasty retreat to the Opera House Restaurant, where he told his story and informed "some of the bystanders that they would have to accompany him to his home, as he was completely unnerved."

The newspaper noted that Wood's disbelief in the underworld was not as strong as it had been before.





It's easy to see how a town as old as ours with a history full of cemeteries and wartime hospitals has many ghost stories for the person who believes in, or at least is entertained by, tales of the supernatural. Perhaps you will have some sympathy for Wood the next time you pass St. Paul's church. Others will perhaps be more curious about the oysters from the Opera House Restaurant.

The Office of Historic Alexandria would like to wish all its readers and guests a Happy Halloween.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.